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Interview with Jeyhun Asgarov of ANS TV

Baku, Azerbaijan

October 23, 2009

ANS: First of all I would like to welcome you to Azerbaijan. If I am not mistaken, this is your first trip to Azerbaijan.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Kaidanow: That's right.

ANS: For the first question, I'd like a little bit of background information on the places you worked before coming to this position. And then, basically, what seems to be the major challenge as far as the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

Kaidanow: First of all, thank you very much for this interview. I appreciate the chance to talk to you and to your viewers directly. As you said, this is my first trip to Azerbaijan, and it's been, I think, a very fruitful and productive trip. I had a chance to talk to the President and the Foreign Minister and the Finance Minister about issues of mutual importance to Azerbaijan and the United States. I also had a chance to speak with some activists in civil society; to talk about the importance of democratization efforts in Azerbaijan. All in all, I think, as I said, it was very productive, and I'm extremely glad that I had the opportunity to be here and to conduct all of these meetings.

You asked about some of the things that I've done before in my diplomatic career. I've done a number of different kinds of things, but I have worked on these issues with regard to this region before. I worked for Deputy Secretary (Richard) Armitage, and, before him, for Deputy Secretary (Strobe) Talbott, and dealt with the Caucasus and with Central Asia, so I do have familiarity with some of the issues in this region.

You asked about Nagorno-Karabakh, and I think it's important to say right away that the United States is very supportive of a peaceful and a just resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. My President and the Secretary of State, Madame

Clinton, have both said this publicly, and they are both very committed to the Minsk Group Process, which is the process we are using to try and resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. We recently appointed Ambassador Robert Bradtke, who is one of our most experienced diplomats, to be the U.S. Co-Chair for the Minsk Group, and we hope to build on what has been a very important and very dynamic process over the next weeks and months.

ANS: However the meeting of the presidents in St. Petersburg and Chisinau indicate that there has been no progress. In this regard, what specific steps is the U.S. going to take to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

Kaidanow: As I said, I think it's very important that the two Presidents – President Aliyev and President Sargsian – have met more intensively over the last four or five months than really at any time previous. I think that the dynamic of those meetings and an intensified series of meetings is quite important. The United States, along with the other two Co-Chairs in the Minsk Group, I think will be trying to engage actively to ensure that there are continued meetings and continued dialogue between the two sides. So far, we have had good cooperation and good understanding from all sides, and I hope that will continue.

ANS: The protocol signing process in Zurich showed that it's possible to press upon Armenia, so it was quite enough for Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov to send a “just sign and leave” note to Edvard Nalbandyan to push him to sign the protocol. In this regard, what is the reason that the OSCE Minsk Group countries, including the United States, do not put pressure on Armenia?

Kaidanow: First of all, let me just say that the United States strongly supports the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia because we see it, again, as a very helpful step towards peace and stability in the entire Caucasus region. Our belief is that that kind of reconciliation can actually have a positive momentum on all the peace processes in the region and that would certainly be our hope.

Every conflict is a little different, and every conflict has a special or a unique strategy for trying to deal with ending that conflict. In this case, I think the positive dynamic that has been created through the Minsk Group Process is the correct and proper way for us to follow up. The United States, through the Minsk Group Process, will continue to invest its energy and its efforts in trying to work towards a resolution.

ANS: Many experts believe that the United States of America is kind of an architect of Armenia-Turkey reconciliation. Then we would like to see what kind of benefits does the United States of America see for itself from the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia?

Kaidanow: Again, I think I would just repeat that we believe very strongly, that the benefit, not for us, particularly, but for the region for a reconciliation process like this, can potentially be immense. It's always the case that when you have general peace and stability in a region that all parties benefit. Transportation routes can be opened, new economic possibilities are created, all kinds of things become possible in an environment where, again, neighbors are speaking to neighbors and have those relations. That is our hope, I think, not just for Turkey and for Armenia, but for the beneficial impact that that process can have on the entire region, including for Azerbaijan.

ANS: That is the view from Washington. Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov said that as soon as the borders are opened between Armenia and Turkey, and as soon as Armenia is becoming more and more economically strong, then the Armenian positions are going to get more and more non-constructive. How would you characterize it?

Kaidanow: First of all, I think we are sensitive to Azerbaijani concerns, and we have tried to address some of those concerns in our discussions, obviously, with Azerbaijani leaders. We've reaffirmed on a number of occasions at very high levels again, our continued interest in the Minsk Group Process and in resolving Nagorno-Karabakh, and that commitment remains unchanged.

I think you're correct in saying that Washington is supportive of the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia. So are a number of others, including the European Union. Obviously the Russian Federation has also been supportive of that process. I think, again, we all feel as though reconciliation in the region overall is a good thing for all parties. But again, we understand Azerbaijani concerns very clearly, and we've tried to address them as best we can, and we will continue to try and work through this process with open dialogue.

ANS: We've seen the Turkish President as well as Turkish Prime Minister claiming again that the borders are not going to be open unless the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is solved. However, the protocols were signed and the protocols are just about to be ratified; after that the border should be opened in two months. So how would you comment on that?

Kaidanow: I don't think I want to comment on specific comments made by the Turkish leadership. They obviously have their own issues and concerns, and they will express it the way that they choose. As I said, we believe the normalization process has a value, is important, and we do hope that the respective parliaments of both sides will move towards ratification. We will continue to be supportive of that process.

ANS: There exists such an opinion that the opening of Armenian-Turkish relations is due to Washington's desire to strengthen its influence upon Armenia. It's no secret that Moscow considers Armenia as its close ally. Does this mean there will be a conflict of interest between the White House and the Kremlin?

Kaidanow: No, actually I would say that on this question and these sets of issues, both on the normalization between Turkey and Armenia and also on the Minsk Group Process, collaboration between the United States and the Russian Federation and, of course, the French government, as well on the Minsk Group side, has been exceptionally close and very good.

I would anticipate, actually, that that cooperation on these sets of issues will continue to be very, very close. Again, because I think we share a common interest in peace and stability in the Caucasus region which is very, very important.

ANS: Turkey has very strong aspirations to be a member of the European Union, and Turkey believes that through the border opening they will actually achieve this. What is the U.S. position towards Turkey membership in the EU?

Kaidanow: First of all, I think Turkey has many reasons for attempting this normalization with Armenia. But I can tell you very sincerely that the United States is a strong supporter of Turkey's aspirations towards the European Union. And both President Obama and Secretary Clinton have said on a number of occasions that we believe that Turkey eventually acceding to the European Union brings a number of benefits to Turkey, to the European Union, and to our transatlantic partnership.

ANS: Some experts say that the United States refusal to deploy the missile defense system in Europe happened after a secret deal between the two courtiers. It may be related to Iran or the South Caucasus. How do you characterize it?

Kaidanow: First of all, the program that the United States has now adopted – which we call a phased, adaptive approach to missile defense – is really aimed at addressing the nature of the threat that we face. Over time the nature of that threat has changed, as well as the technical capability that we have to address it.

So the new program of missile defense that the United States is adopting will allow us to do several things. It will allow us to be more flexible in the way that we address the threats that are facing us; and it will also allow us to protect our friends, our partners and our allies in ways that the previous system would not have allowed us to do. So there were a number of reasons why we chose to take this new approach, all of which, again, were based on very sound technical reasons and the changing nature of the threat over time.

ANS: Speaking about U.S.-Russia relations, can we say that the relationship has been "reset" between the two countries?

Kaidanow: I think first of all the United States and Russia both realize that there are many areas of mutual interest that we have across the globe and that it is always helpful if we can address them together. In all of those areas where it is possible to have fruitful cooperation, I think both of our governments will seek to find ways to enhance that cooperation.

I think it's important to note that there are issues on which we and the Russian Federation will not agree. Secretary Clinton made that clear in her recent visit to Moscow. But she also made clear that, again, in those areas where we have mutual interests we will pursue them vigorously.

ANS: The U.S.-Russia joint use of the Gabala radar station is gain on the agenda. Do you want to use this station?

Kaidanow: I think at this stage we have not come to any conclusions about the use of the radar, but we will continue to explore with the Russians possibilities for future cooperation on missile defense. I think the important thing to emphasize is because Gabala is on Azerbaijani soil, any discussion of the use of that radar in the future would have to involve Azerbaijan, and we recognize that.

ANS: Russia has resumed the purchase of Turkmen gas. A number of people think that this has brought into question the need for the Nabucco pipeline, which is also supported by the United States. How would you characterize this situation?

Kaidanow: First of all, I think that the United States strongly supports projects that will provide energy security to Europe and to other parts of the world. But maybe even more important, projects that will enhance the sovereignty and the independence of the countries of the Caucasus region and of Central Asia.

So we support projects that will develop pipelines, for example, that are both commercially viable and environmentally sound. And there are a variety of projects that might move gas from East to West in that way.

We do believe it is important for Turkey and Azerbaijan to resolve their remaining differences on sales price, transit terms, and so forth because we think that will create a helpful commercial environment that will benefit both Azerbaijan, the other transit countries, and, of course, the consuming nations in Europe and further on.

With regard to Nabucco, specifically, I think that project did take a step forward in July when the governments of the region signed an intergovernmental agreement on the Nabucco pipeline. But, ultimately, it's going to really be the decision point for private companies, for the governments of the region here, and, of course, for the consuming nations at the other end whether this pipeline gets built or some other version of a transit methodology will be utilized.

Again, I think our belief is that what is important is the diversification of sources for both oil and gas, as well as a diversification of the routes to market for oil and gas. The more choices there are, the better off everyone is, and that's certainly beneficial for Azerbaijan.

ANS: And the last question: people in Azerbaijan are very much interested in what is the reason for the delay in the appointment of a new US ambassador to Azerbaijan?

Kaidanow: The United States government is perhaps a little unique in that it has a number of what we call political appointees, meaning that a new administration is able to put its own people in those positions. I think we have a number of positions, I'm sorry to say, that still deserve consideration and that we will have to think about in terms of filling because they're important to us. We take these decisions extremely seriously. Azerbaijan is a very important partner for us, as I've said, and we will take that decision very seriously as well.

ANS: Hopefully the new ambassador will be appointed to Azerbaijan by the end of this year.

Kaidanow: Oh, I can never make predictions. This decision is for our administration and our Congress to make. But again, we are very respectful of Azerbaijan, and we will take that process very seriously.

ANS: Thank you very much.

Kaidanow: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

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